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# Film Language and the Persistence of Racial Stereotyping in The Last of the Mohicans (1992)

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January 1997

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## Journal of Contemporary Thought, 1997

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GARY EDGERTON

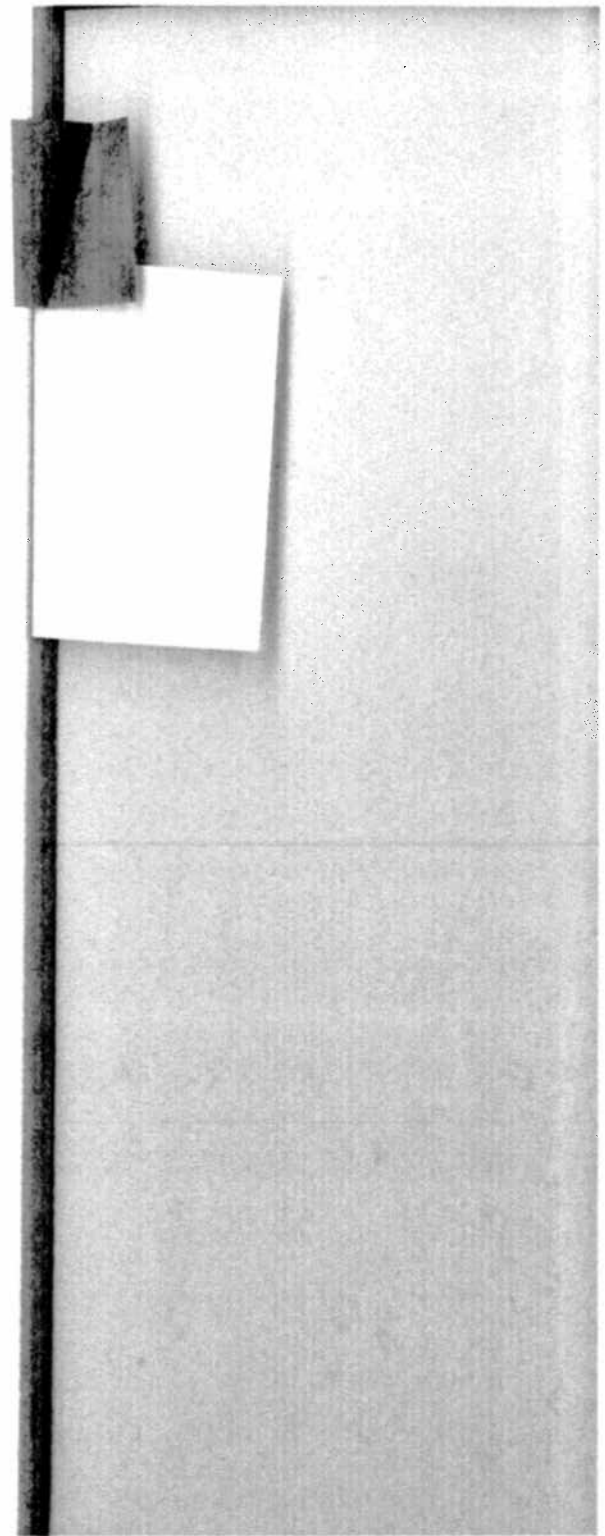
## Film Language and Persistence of Racial Stereotyping in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992)

"The Last of the Mohicans" (1936) is probably the first film I saw as a child. It was a black-and-white 16 millimeter print, and I must have been three or four — it's the first sense memory I have of a motion picture.

Michael Mann, producer-writer-director, 1992 adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* ("The Last of the Mohicans: Press Kit" 2).

Hollywood producers have regularly adapted James Fenimore Cooper's 1826 novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, ever since the beginnings of the American film industry.<sup>1</sup> D. W. Griffith directed the first of many versions with his two-reeler, *Leather Stocking*, in 1909 for Biograph. Republic's *In the Days of the Six Nations*, Powers's *Last of the Mohicans*, and Thanhouser's *The Last of the Mohicans*, all followed Griffith's precedent in 1911 by devoting 15-to-20 minutes to a few episodes from the original novel and a portrayal of Native Americans which fluctuates between extremes of nobility and barbarism, mostly stressing the latter.

The first feature-length silent adaptation, *The Last of the Mohicans*, directed by Maurice Tourneur in 1920 for Associated Producers, contains the full-gamut of pernicious features now ascribed to the Hollywood Indian which, by 1920, was an image well established on movie screens throughout the world. In this version, Uncas (Albert Roscoe) functions primarily as the one "good" Indian, since Chingachgook (Theodore Lerch) and even Hawkeye (Harry Lorraine) are restricted to minor appearances and relatively little screen time. The most compelling character by far is Magua (Wallace Berry) who leads scores of drunken, dangerous, and primitive Hurons. These creatures are presented as being distinctly different than whites, almost subhuman, costumed in war paint and caveman skins. They are physically



strong, practically indestructible, but also childlike, unpredictable, and prone to violent behavior. Magua, for example, stabs Cora repeatedly during the final rebuke at the cliff, after leering at her in uninhibited ways for much of the picture. The savage Magua also kills Uncas before Hawkeye puts a final end to this "forbidden love" triangle and the film's lingering threat of miscegenation by shooting him from afar.

Several useful studies (Bataille and Silet; Friar and Friar; Marsden and Nachbar; O'Connor) already exist that lay the necessary groundwork for understanding the parameters of the Amerindian stereotype on film. These analyses focus on "good" and "bad" character types and traits; and furnish us with a composite which is deeply conflicted and contradictory, as is common of most racial, ethnic, and gender stereotyping. Marsden and Nachbar, most inclusively, describe the cultural context of captivity narratives, dime novels, stage melodramas, and Wild West shows which all contributed to Hollywood's rendition of the Native American. They also provide a three-part model of Amerindian characterizations on film where men compose the first two stereotypes as either "noble anachronisms" or "savage reactionaries"; and women are presented as "Indian princesses" in the third, if indeed they are given any kind of serious attention on-screen at all, which does not happen often.

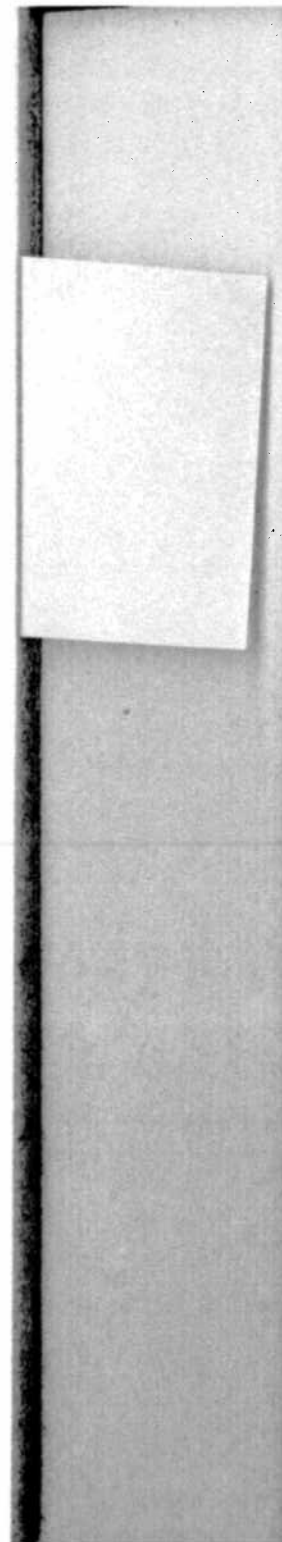
In the first category, Chingachgook and Uncas are, of course, prototypical "noble anachronisms," who embody Rousseau's notion of "natural man and his inherent goodness," but are ultimately doomed by the onslaught of Euro-American culture. Magua and his warrior companions are ideal examples of "savage reactionaries" who confront white manifest destiny with violent defiance, but are also annihilated within these films for the overall good of advancing civilization. Lastly, the "Indian princess" stereotype is rooted in the legend of Pocahontas, and is typically expressed through characters who are maidenly, demure, and deeply committed to some white man (in Pocahontas's case Captain John Smith). Amerindian

women, however, are virtually non-existent in all versions of *The Last of the Mohicans*, reinforcing the patriarchal and colonial dictates that still shape and animate this story.

There are clearly many complex reasons why *The Last of the Mohicans* has endured as a popular adventure for more than a century and a half. Recent critics (Axelrad; Blakemore; Donovan; Kelly; Merlock; Rans; Romero; Tompkins, "No Apologies for the Iroquois") have addressed specifics of narrativity, generic inventiveness, and the effective structuring of the prevailing social order, along with several other related ideological concerns, most especially empire building and race. A generation ago, in fact, Leslie Fiedler suggested that the "secret theme" of *The Last of the Mohicans* "is miscegenation," along with "the question of the relations between men of different races in the New World" (Fiedler 197-207). During the intervening thirty years, this flash point is no longer so "secret"; and from our vantage point in the 1990s, it is increasingly apparent that Cooper's narrative and the many subsequent filmed adaptations are not only grounded in repressed feelings in the national psyche about race, but also our changing relationship to Eurocentric culture as well.

In the 1936 version of *Last of the Mohicans*, directed by George Seitz for United Artists, the fundamental stresses within the story are shifted from the love triangle of Uncas/Cora/Magua to a new one involving Hawkeye/Alice/Heyward, which further suppresses the Native American presence in the narrative. European imperialistic designs are highlighted from the beginning with a graphic proclaiming: "1757—The Seven Year War Shakes Europe. France and England Fight on Three Continents." This is the first filmed adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* to foreground the dynastic and military power struggle that lay behind the French and Indian War. Likewise the British monarch, George II, is introduced as "German George," no doubt a loaded reference for audiences in the mid-1930s with both the rise of Nazi Germany and the memory of World War I.

Hawkeye (Randolph Scott) appears within minutes in a scene



that climaxes with his public challenge of Colonel Munro and Major Heyward's appeal to the colonists to take up arms against the French and Indians. At this early stage the men of the colonial militia do decide to join with the English, but the impending conflict between the Old World and the New is foreshadowed in their singing of "Yankee Doodle" as they march off to Fort William Henry. Hawkeye asserts his independence by staying behind with Chingachgook (Robert Barrat) and Uncas (Philip Reed), and in the next scene he tells Alice: "I have too much sense to wear a redcoat in the woods."

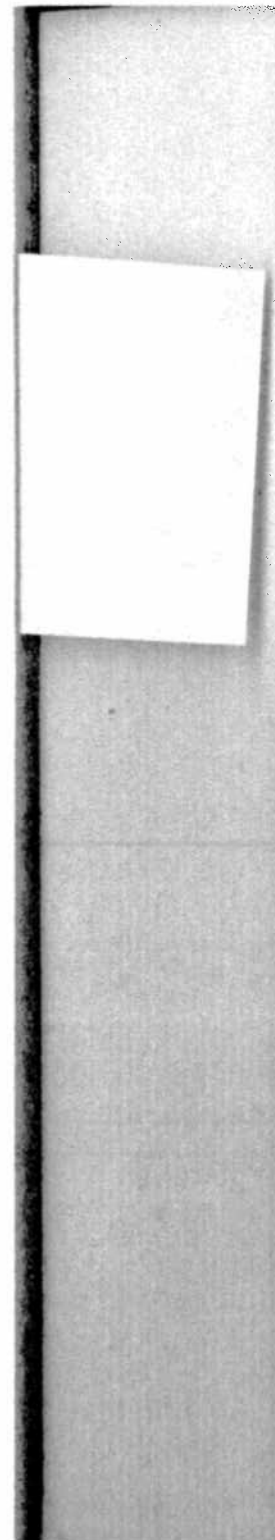
Several fundamental differences are established at the outset of this motion picture. Hawkeye is far more anti-authoritarian and disparaging of British colonial policies than he ever is in the novel; and this resistance to European hegemony in North America was simply never an issue in any of the previous filmed adaptations. The national rivalry between England and France remains, but a strong undercurrent of American skepticism towards the validity and usefulness of European perceptions and customs becomes far more pronounced than ever before. In a later confrontation that is also incorporated into the 1992 filmed version, for example, Hawkeye petitions Colonel Munro to release the colonial militia after he has learned that the Hurons are planning a series of attacks on outlying and unprotected homesteads. When Munro refuses, Hawkeye responds defiantly: "If this is an example of British colonial policy, we'd do better to make our own peace with the French"; thus, foreshadowing the discontent that will lead to the eventual revolution of 1776.

The introduction of a love affair between Hawkeye and Alice similarly suggests a radically different vision of America's future. Hawkeye is set apart in the book; he is courtly but generally indifferent to women. In the last chapter of the novel, in fact, the betrothal of Heyward and Alice strongly intimates that these are the characters who will settle down in the colonies and contribute to the lineage of a new America. In the 1936 film, in contrast, Hawkeye is evidently attracted to Alice from

the beginning. He welcomes her advances throughout, and even kisses her in the final scene after she tells him: "You know it takes more than rifles to make a new civilization, it takes spinning wheels too. When you come back I'll be waiting for you in Albany." Obviously this is a remodeled Hawkeye; his relationship with Alice promises to transform the singular beau ideal of the *Leatherstocking Tales* into the family man of a newly forming and soon to be independent nation.

The significance of this coupling of Hawkeye and Alice is to also leave Chingachgook to face extinction and obsolescence alone. Uncas is once more killed off by a particularly sullen and ferocious Magua (Bruce Cabot), while Cora jumps to her death when faced with the prospect of becoming "Magua's squaw." Taken as a whole, the 1936 adaptation is yet another example of negative Indian stereotyping by Hollywood. In this version Chingachgook and Uncas are the two "noble anachronisms" pitted against Magua and his swarm of "savage reactionaries," implying that individual Indians can be "good," but the group must ultimately be depicted as "bad" in order to justify their eventual extermination. Native American women, moreover, only appear on-screen for several moments during a brief captivity scene in the Huron camp when they are reduced to shrieking harpies, hitting Alice and Cora with branches. These actions are clearly meant to contrapose the grace and femininity of the Anglos with the vulgarity of these creatures who are apparently beyond civilizing and saving.

The contorted and reductive nature of the 1936 version likewise extends to ethnographic and linguistic matters. Employing the shorthand of Hollywood, the plurality of Amerindian cultures is homogenized to wigs, feathers, war paint, phony beadwork, breechcloths moccasins, smoke signals, sign language, canoes and tepees. All "good" or prominent Indian roles, such as Chingachgook, Uncas, and Magua, are cast with white actors, while the many whopping, frenzied, and dancing extras are mostly Native American performers. The Indian characters





with dialogue also speak pidgin English in a halting monotone, thus reinforcing the impression that they are slow-witted and unsophisticated. In this film, for instance, Chingachgook is actually given the part of expressing the strongest reservations about the budding romance between Uncas and Cora: "Pale face squaw no good Mohican. Fair hair make heart of Uncas weak like water." Racism and sexism so penetrate the 1936 version that even Chingachgook is conceived in such a way as to give voice to these attitudes.

One of the most curious aspects of the 1992 adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* is that Michael Mann chose to base his remake as much on the 1936 screenplay by Philip Dunne as the original novel by Cooper. His response to the book was that he "found parts of it very provocative and powerful," although in general, he disliked Cooper's deeply conservative views on race, his mixing up of tribal names and iconography, and his indulging in poetic excesses for the purpose of telling his epic adventure tale. ("The Last of the Mohicans: Press Kit" 2). Mann also publicly announced while promoting the film during the summer of 1992 that one of his main intentions in co-producing, co-writing, and directing yet another remake was "to counter some of the misconceptions about 18th century Native American culture" ("The Last of the Mohicans: Press Kit" 3).

Russell Means, the well-known Indian activist who also co-stars as Chingachgook, was similarly vocal in suggesting a revisionist representation of Native American life and culture, thus lending an important and unprecedented stamp of approval to the soon to be released motion picture:

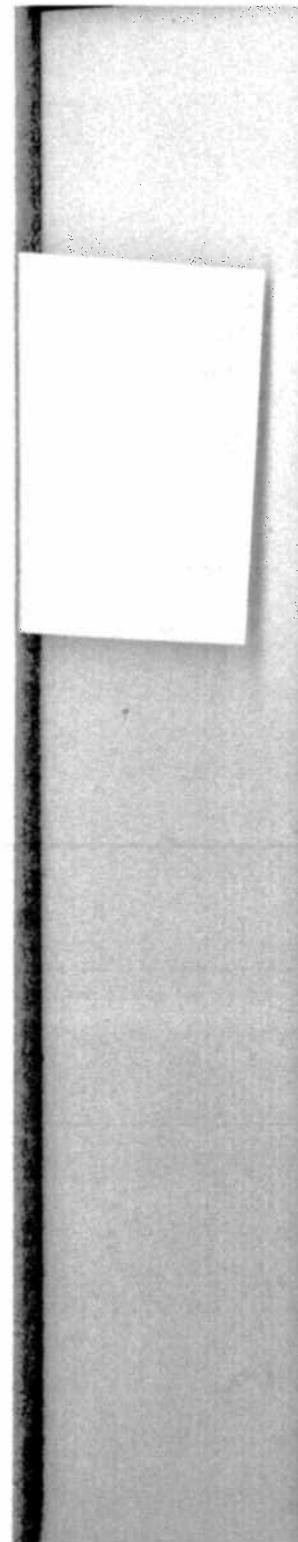
The screenplay when I first read it, I loved it. It creates cinematic history. Now my character is three-dimensional, has all the positive attributes of a human being. Chingachgook has quiet dignity and ferocity and it is something as leader of the American Indian Movement I learned to cultivate. This film is a definite plus for Indian people, and Indian and white relationships ("The Last of the Mohicans: Audio/Visual Press Kit").

Considering the primary focus of Twentieth Century Fox's promotional effort, the most surprising feature about *The Last*

of the *Mohicans* when it finally opened on September 25, 1992 was its conventionality in style and ideology, especially in light of the debate that was going on at the time surrounding the quincentenary of Columbus's voyage. No doubt, the externals of pre-Revolutionary Anglo and Native American life are rendered conscientiously from "the patterns for woven burden-straps, breech cloths, knife sheaths, war clubs, tomahawks, war paint, tattooing and hair designs for each of four different native cultures" to a 300-by-400 foot replica of Fort William Henry built in the old-growth forests of the Smokey Mountains in North Carolina ("The Last of the Mohicans: Press Kit" 6). Michael Mann also touted his satisfaction with the way the film turned out to the entertainment press, explaining "audiences today are more visually sophisticated. They know the real deal, and they know when they've been shortchanged" (Ansen 49).

In hindsight, Mann and his colleagues certainly exhibit a good deal of unreflective faith in the ability of surface realism alone to capture a sense of historicity and authentic human drama. As Mann maintained in several interviews: "I wanted history to become as vivid and real and immediate as if it were being lived right now" ("The Last of the Mohicans: Press Kit" 3). He further contended that "the details make this movie ring true" (Ansen 49). Verisimilitude in motion pictures, however, is merely one of several stylistic options available to Mann, and mimetic accuracy must be taken in perspective, despite the medium's potential for creating such a strong illusion of reality. The cinema, like all the other arts, is a social construction; and filmmakers make technical decisions and shape chronological episodes into identifiable plot structures, highlighting some ideas, attitudes, and values, while suppressing others.

In this way, Mann's portrayals of Chingachgook and Uncas are clearly designed to be sympathetic, despite the fact that they are minimally developed; and Magua is given the necessary justifications in the script to make his rage and desire for revenge understandable. On the other hand, these characterizations are exactly what Robert Stam and Louise Spence are writing



about when they note in *Screen* that "[t]he insistence on 'positive images', finally, obscures the fact that 'nice' images might at times be as pernicious as overtly degrading ones, providing a...facade for paternalism, a more pervasive racism" (Stam and Spence 3). The ideology of race is encoded by filmmakers in many different ways, and this version of *The Last of the Mohicans* is a prime example of how methodologies on racial stereotyping need to extend beyond the mere describing of "good" and "bad" images to a consideration of other cinematic codes of language and storytelling, such as plot structure; camera point-of-view and the positioning of the spectator; relative image size, framing, on-screen time, and the amount and kind of dialogue afforded certain characters, among other aural and visual variables.

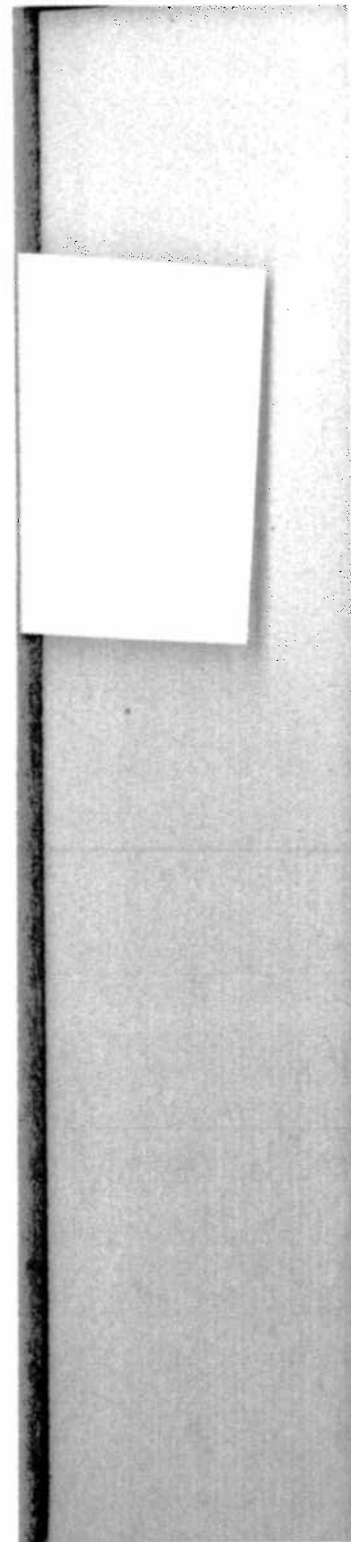
Appendices 1, 2 and 3, for example, suggest just how extensively the Native American presence is repressed throughout this text. Appendix 1 diagrams the overall plot which is composed of 7 major sequences and 40 scenes. As with any motion picture, the character focus in each of these scenes can be determined by analyzing whose point-of-view is imposed by the camera setups, compositional dynamics, and the flow of the dramatic action. Given this agenda, appendices 2 and 3 address the first and last scenes individually, outlining how each is structured, as well as providing reference points for considering how they bracket the parameters of the storyline of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) as a whole.

Scene 1, the deer hunt, effectively establishes the film's cultural and ideological agenda. The opening credits are superimposed over a vast panorama of the forest primeval, intimating that we are now on a journey back to the origins of our past. The next five shots follow Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis), a graceful, hyperkinetic character, running with abandon against the immense presence of the lush and fertile woodland. By shot 8 he is joined by a companion, Uncas (Eric Schweig), who is also evidently a man of action, sharing youth, dexterity, and a good deal of screen-time with Hawkeye, although he

is generally given secondary framing to the side or in the background of their 10 shots and 52 seconds together. In shots 9 and 15, the solitary patriarch, Chingachgook (Russell Means), is shown running by himself; he is clearly capable, but slower and less in control of the search and destroy ritual than his sons are.

All told, this first scene is composed of 34 shots, lasting 2 minutes and 34 seconds. Hawkeye dominates the proceedings, being in 21 of the shots for 106 seconds; Uncas is next with 16 shots for 77 seconds; Chingachgook is in 7 shots for 43 seconds; and the stag is shown in 5 shots for 5 seconds. More importantly, the deer hunt is photographed primarily from Hawkeye's point-of-view. He leads the chase, and the 5 shots that picture the stag only appear when he looks towards the animal. The scene climaxes between shots 18 and 27 with Hawkeye aiming his rifle, "killdeer," followed by 3 close-ups on Hawkeye alone which further punctuate the intensity of the moment. The scene then ends quietly with Chingachgook speaking words of respect and sorrow in Munsee Delaware over the dead animal. Significantly, though, Hawkeye is still the focal point of 3 of these last 7 shots (i.e., 28, 29, and 33), while Uncas is highlighted in two other reaction shots (i.e., 31 and 34), leaving only shots 30 and 32 for Chingachgook's speech, and none are close-ups, thus undercutting his screen presence.

This opening scene essentially introduces the main character and his closest friends at this point in the story, fixes the cultural landscape as a kind of Darwinian proving ground, and most importantly, animates the drama from a white, patriarchal viewpoint. Although not a mainstream Western, Jane Tompkins could easily be describing the fictional world of *The Last of the Mohicans* when she succinctly delineates a milieu that "privilege[s] the male realm of public power, physical ordeal, homosociality, and the rituals of the duel" in her richly perceptive analysis, *West of Everything* (Tompkins 42). A deer hunt in the wilderness is about as far away



from the traditional sphere and influence of women as these particular filmmakers (and Cooper before them) can imagine. Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook are free to roam far from the strictures of society, testing their endurance and stalking skills, and rarely stopping their incessant running around to talk and interact on a more personal level. When Chingachgook does finally speak at the end, he is significantly acting out the final benediction of the hunting ritual rather than sharing any sort of real intimacy, as his words are short, to-the-point, and meant to clearly foreground the maleness of the hunters and victims alike: "We're sorry to kill you, Brother. We do honor to your courage and speed, your strength."

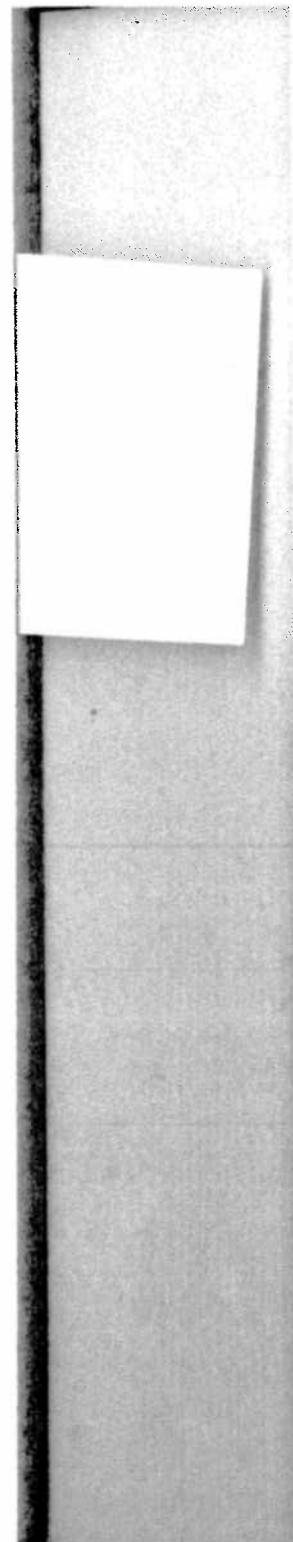
Besides Cora (Madeleine Stowe), Alice (Jodhi May), and ever so briefly, Alexandra Cameron (Tracey Ellis), women are mostly absent from this film. Reference is never made to Chingachgook's wife and Uncas's mother. Whether Cora and Alice have different mothers as they do in the novel is also irrelevant to this adaptation. Power in this movie is exclusively male-defined and its expression is emphatically measured by the ability to kill, as opposed to give, nurture, and administer life which, of course, are skills and capabilities that are traditionally associated with women. Cora, for example, is the one character in this movie who undergoes a dramatic transformation, as one critic describes, "falling in love is ... literally the experience of culture shock" for her (Smith 77). She passionately embraces her new surroundings, in the process, telling Hawkeye in scene 9 during their conversation underneath the stars that the frontier is "more deeply stirring to my blood than any imagining could possibly have been." By scene 27, the second ambush, she proves herself fully adapted to the male-centered ethos of the wilderness by killing a Huron warrior with a pistol. In contrast, Alice is unable to cope, and she, like Alexandra Cameron before her, eventually falls victim to Indian "savage reactionaries."

*The Last of the Mohicans* has always been recognized as one of the bloodiest novels in American literature; and the 1992 filmed adaptation merely extends these same violent tendencies

to a level conducive with Hollywood's action-adventure standards. The ideology of maleness in this movie clearly links power and prestige with a mounting body count: under this criterion, prestige with a mounting body count: under this criterion, Hawkeye again dominates the fictional environment by killing 17 men and 1 stag over the course of 6 scenes. Uncas kills 11 times in 4 scenes but 5 of these killings occur as he pursues Magua (Wes Studi) leading up to their final confrontation, which in the symbolic rhetoric of movie violence is meant to soften the blow of his own eventual demise. Magua, who is afforded more dialogue and a much stronger dramatic presence than either Uncas or Chingachgook, is still limited in status by his villainy and, therefore, is "only" able to kill 7 men over 3 scenes to Chingachgook's 10, which is also accomplished in 3 scenes. Magua is a formidable opponent, however, and his influence to affect the shape of events far outweighs his English adversaries: in this way, the "Grayhair," Munro, is able to kill just once, while Heyward fells two Hurons in the first ambush, but his growing insignificance is indicated by his lack of fighting effectiveness after that, especially during the second ambush.

An orgy of killing in scenes 37, 38, 39, the film's climax, reaches a nearly hypnotic and numbing effect with the interweaving of slow-motion camerawork, montage editing, and New Age Celtic music, ushering in the elegiac coda which is scene 40, the final tableau. As in the deer hunt, this last scene begins with a slow panorama of the forest primeval, suggesting again the dawn of history from an Anglo-American perspective. Three lone survivors, Chingachgook, Hawkeye, and Cora, each marked and tempered by death, stand together on a mountain top gazing into the vastness of the landscape. The male idyll of the deer hunt is now transformed by the presence of Cora, who compositionally replaces Uncas by Hawkeye's side; and prompts an undercurrent of ambivalence and confusion with this change in relations.

Scene 40 is actually far more complex and conflicted than



it appears on the surface. From a purely structural point-of-view, it is divided into two distinct parts: the first half is built around Chingachgook's prayer to the "Great Spirit"; the second shifts attention to the romance between Hawkeye and Cora, which is this film's highest priority. The formal choices of the filmmakers again emphasize Hawkeye at the expense of Chingachgook. Of the 40 scenes in this film, as outlined in Appendix 1, Chingachgook is afforded primary focus only twice, in scene 39 when he kills Magua and in this final tableau; and secondary focus just once in the previously discussed deer hunt. Even within this parting coda, one of his three most prominent moments in the plot, many of the elements of film form—camera positioning, framing, shot selection, and incidental music—all work to limit his full impact on-screen.

Appendix 3 delineates how the final tableau is composed of 18 shots lasting a total of 2 minutes and 42 seconds. Hawkeye is in 16 shots for 134 seconds; Chingachgook is in 9 shots for 101 seconds; and Cora is in 13 shots for 91 seconds. More importantly, Chingachgook is never on-screen alone, as compared to Cora who has 2 long close-ups in shots 3 and 8 which effectively bracket Chingachgook's prayer, thus keeping the love angle conspicuously present until the close-ups of Hawkeye and Cora, kissing and hugging, and the romantic background music can take over the dramatic flow of the scene from shot 9 through shot 17. Even in the 3 shots where Chingachgook is speaking, shot 4 is a long shot where he is positioned screen left, Hawkeye is standing "center stage," and Cora is to the right; in the close-up, shot 5, Hawkeye is reacting in the front of the frame as Chingachgook is talking in the midground; and when Chingachgook is finally given center frame in shot 6, the camera pulls back to a medium shot.

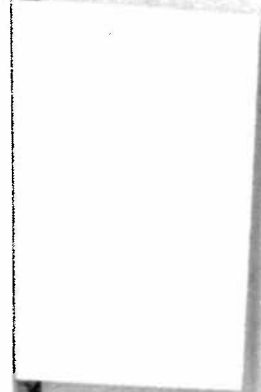
The mournful nature of this series of shots is a result of both the tragic passing of Uncas three scenes before and the courageous way that Chingachgook is apparently facing up to his own eventual demise. Chingachgook simply has no

future in Euro-American terms, thus he chooses to graciously bow out of this story (and history) altogether. His prayer to this extent, listed verbatim in Appendix 3, is interesting on two accounts: first, the words are virtually identical to those spoken by Robert Barrat as Chingachgook in the 1936 movie version. These sentiments are pure Hollywood hokum, not an ethnographically accurate representation as the visual iconography (e.g., hairstyles, costuming, etc.) might suggest. Second, Chingachgook prays in English. The small bits of dialogue that he is given throughout the film are mostly delivered in Munsee Delaware; and speaking to his God would seem to require using his own native tongue. Chingachgook, however, is not so much a fully developed character in his own right, as a visual icon, the prototypical "noble anachronism," and the filmmakers present him more for the spectacle of his magnanimity and resignation than anything else.

The journey from scenes 1 through 40, in a sense, resolves the racial "otherness" of Chingachgook by eliminating any meaningful options for him in this new emerging world. None of the "other" Native American characters, in fact, are allowed to assimilate, or be accommodated in any way. Scene 35 at the Huron camp essentially closes off all alternatives besides obsolescence and annihilation when Hawkeye discredits Magua for internalizing the ways of the French and the English:

Hawkeye: "Would the Huron make his Algonquin brother foolish with brandy and steal his land to sell for gold to the white man? Would Huron have greed for more land than a man could use? Would Huron fool the Senecan to take in all the furs of all the animals in the forest for beads and strong whiskey? Would Huron kill every man, woman, or child of their enemy? Those are the ways of the Yangees and the Francais traders and their masters in Europe infected with the sickness of greed, Magua's heart is twisted. He would make himself into what twisted him."

This speech is obviously an indictment of the Euro-colonial tradition; on the other hand, the Indian characters are left at the end of the movie with little more than the doomed knowledge of their own moral superiority since any degree of assimilation or accommodation is now defined by the film's





hero as being tantamount to total corruption.

The interracial affair between Uncas and Alice is also lifeless, undeveloped, and a dead-end; they must suffer the same consequences that Uncas and Cora do in Cooper's novel for being attracted to one another across racial lines. A multicultural union between Uncas and Alice is still inconceivable, and Uncas's death once again seals his perfection as the other "noble anachronism" in the story. The symbolic complexity of Cora in the book is likewise completely repressed in this filmed adaptation. Cooper imagined her as the product of the white Scot Munro and the daughter of a West Indian gentleman, whose wife was a descendant of "that unfortunate class [Negro] who are so basely enslaved to administer to the wants of a luxurious people" (Cooper 188). Keeping Cora a mixture of races and nationalities (instead of Madeleine Stowe's ivory cameo come to life), and then linking her romantically with the cultural hybrid, Hawkeye, would be a bold and revisionist move for a Hollywood filmmaker today. Such a choice would also be more consistent with the righteous indignation expressed by Michael Mann during the film's promotional tour:

One of the first big realizations I had in my research was the extent to which James Fenimore Cooper, to add insult to injury, appropriated and discarded the entire history of the Northeastern Woodlands American Indians. What he took away was their power. If you were living on the frontier in 1757, the Mohawks were your rich neighbours. They were not some group of menservants (Engel 12).

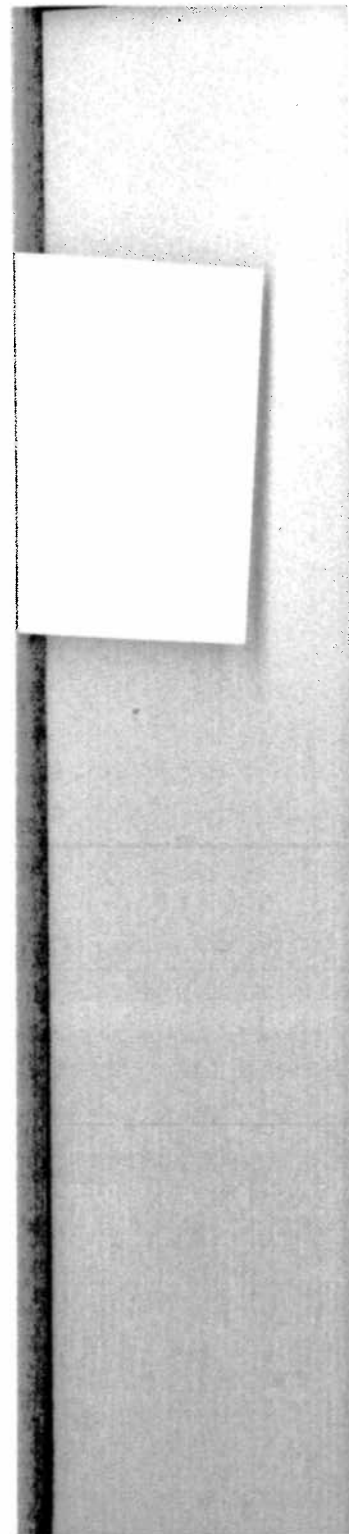
*The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) never provides an expanded and in-depth portrayal of Amerindian life and culture, however. Chingachgook and Uncas's relationship with Hawkeye is sketchy at best; and generally, the pernicious distortions of the old Hollywood Indian is replaced by fading Native American presence altogether. Appendix 1, for example, provides a brief description of all 40 scenes in the movie, along with an overall rendering of which characters have primary and secondary focus in each. Hawkeye, not surprisingly, is given the most attention with 23 primary scenes of the 26 in which he appears. His love interest, Cora is next (6 primary and 7 secondary scenes).

Magua is third (7 primary and 3 secondary scenes), establishing his credibility as the villain, and highlighting the fact that the most prominent Native American character in this film is still a "bad" Indian, whose death is deserved, desired, and justified.

What is most revealing about the remaining characterizations is that Heyward (2 primary and 4 secondary scenes) Jack Winthrop, the leader of the militia (1 primary and 3 secondary scenes), and Colonel Munro (2 primary and 1 secondary scene), all match or exceed the dramatic focus and attention provided to either Chingachgook (2 primary and 1 secondary scene) or Uncas (1 primary and 1 secondary scene). In terms of plot structure, Chingachgook and Uncas remain second-class citizens, which further supports the evidence throughout this film that Michael Mann's formal and stylistic decisions actually undercut his stated intentions to revise the negative stereotyping of Native Americans in *The Last of the Mohicans* from Cooper through Hollywood's many versions.

Mann at 50 is one of a number of Hollywood filmmakers from the same generation who have recently produced a small resurgence in mainstream motion pictures involving Amerindian stories and characters (e.g., *The Emerald Forest* (1985), *The Mission* (1986), *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *Black Robe* (1991), *At Play in the Field of the Lord* (1991), *Thunderheart* (1992), *The Dark Wind* (1992), and *Pocahontas* (1995), among many others). In one way or another, these films all try to come to grips with the colonial past of the Americans, and the diversity of races and nationalities that are a part of that history. As one prominent historian has recently noted, this is a current preoccupation shared in his profession as well:

Frontier history is the story of the contact of cultures, their competition and their continuing relations. It cannot be the story of any one side. "Multiculturalism," which is becoming the source of sweeping (and often painful) reappraisals of almost every area of American life, has a special claim to attention for historians of the West. No other region has had so long and intensive an experience of racial and ethnic diversity; no other place displays the imprint of multiculturalism more clearly. (Brinkley 27)



According to John Cawelti in the second edition of his seminal book, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, the decline of the Western as a popular story form has to do with several key factors; still, the genre's unsympathetic and racist presentations of Native Americans, Latinos, and African-Americans heads the list (Cawelti 1-22). This newest wave of Indian films, in fact, is largely preoccupied with addressing this very concern, albeit from different perspectives. Despite Russell Means's public dismissal of *Dances With Wolves* as "Lawrence of the Plains," for example, *The Last of the Mohicans* is as old-fashioned an epic as Kevin Costner's motion picture, and far more conservative in its conclusions about multiculturalism (Hooper). Where John Dunbar and the Lakota Sioux are supremely adept at finding common ground in *Dances With Wolves*, and *Black Robe*, to cite another film, is more tough-minded and despairing in presenting French colonial and Native American cultures as always in conflict, this adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* generally opts for romance and nostalgia.

Cora: "Then you're the one. I apologize. I misunderstood you."

Hawkeye: "That's to be expected. My father Chingachgook, warned me about people like you. He said do not try to understand them. Don't try to make them understand you. That's because they are a breed apart and make no sense."

The filmmakers's assumptions about race and ethnicity surface in virtually every scene, but never more conclusively than in the metaphor, "a breed apart." Hawkeye's words reverberate in terms of gender, to be sure, although the logic of the plot leads inexorably away from the all-male bonding ritual of the deer hunt in scene 1 to his quick and inevitable coupling with Cora by scene 18. "A breed apart" literally refers to the Euro-colonials, as the British, especially, are presented as naively and arrogantly out-of-step in everything from their red coats to their antiquated fighting methods to Heyward's assertion that they intend to "make the world English." As a result, Cora decides to desert her culture, class, and family for Hawkeye, and, in turn, he also drifts away from his adopted Native American family, such as it is in this motion picture.

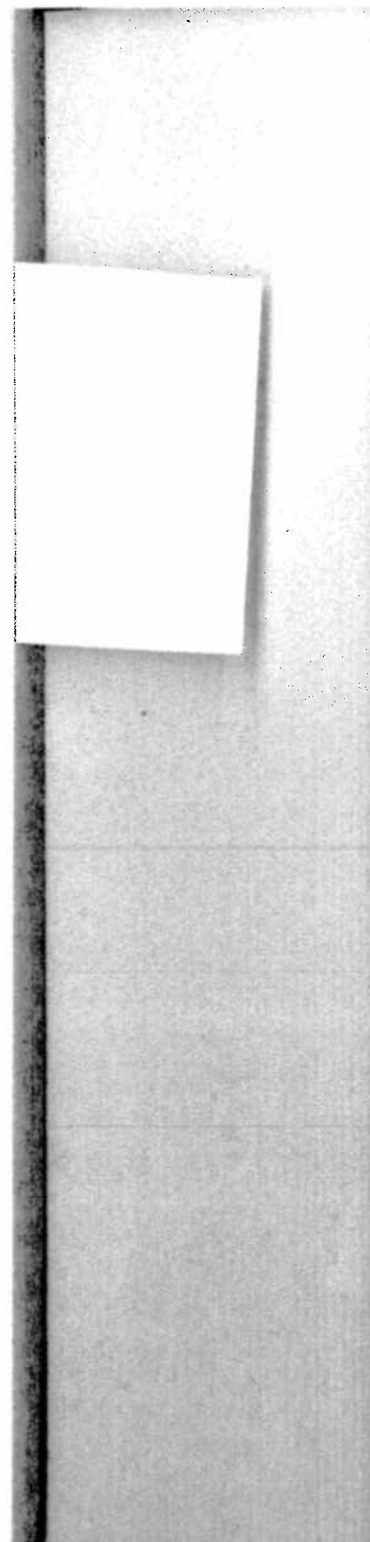
Where Hawkeye and Chingachgook are just close friends in the novel, there is some degree of tokenism in creating a father/son relationship in this new film, then having Chingachgook lament at the end, "Great Spirit...they are all there but one, I Chingachgook, the last of the Mohicans." Hawkeye was raised Mohican, and sent to Reverend Wheelock's school to learn English when he was 10 by an apparently far-sighted and multiculturally-aware Chingachgook. Now all of a sudden Hawkeye is supposedly no longer Mohican, but has become more Anglo as he falls further in love with Cora. The complexity raised by this evident dissonance in the text is, of course, whether Hawkeye's ethnicity is the product of his cultural experiences or his biology. Although this complicated issue is never directly addressed in the movie, the characters behave as though genes are all that count in determining one's breeding.

Magua similarly gives voice to the specter of genocide; significantly, the European characters never talk in such terms:

Magua: "When the 'Greyhair' is dead, Magua will eat his heart.  
Before he dies, Magua will put his children under the knife,  
so the 'Greyhair' will know his seed is wiped out forever."

As in the novel, North America is portrayed in this movie as a battleground of races and nationalities. The British and the French are fighting for "Possession of the Continent," as characterized in the opening graphic. They have enlisted various Native American tribes as mercenaries in their struggle for empire. In the process, whites do contend with whites; and Indians with Indians. The most heartfelt and vicious confrontation, however, is between Native Americans and Europeans. The French and Indian War of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) is, first and foremost, a race war; and the viability and appropriateness of a multiracial future for America is its primary concern.

Beginning with Cooper and including every filmed adaptation through 1992, *The Last of the Mohicans* is told from a distinctly colonial point-of-view. Despite the historical record, Magua is presented as the most violent aggressor, not the chivalric, Montcalm, or the ever-reasonable, Munro. Magua's depiction in this latest film, for instance, is as a hate-filled (if understandable),



creature of the id, who devours the heart of his enemy, "Greyhair." The filmmakers, interestingly, follow Cooper's example once again, masking any Anglo-American responsibility by having another Indian character, Chingachgook, chop Magua to bits. In the process, Native American images continue to be used in this newest version, intentionally or unintentionally, to present the viewpoint of the historically privileged rather than the oppressed.

The only time that Hawkeye experiences the ideal of different races living together in harmony is in the first scene, when he, Uncas, and Chingachgook, are deep within the forest primeval and far away from the influences of mainstream white society. This implicit cynicism about the mixing of races is a common sentiment throughout America today, as is the film's prevailing assumption that little can be done to resolve racial tensions. In this way, the Magua of 1992 no longer embodies the threat of miscegenation, as much as the simmering rage of impending violence. This latest Magua is so alienated from the Yankees for their atrocities, in fact, that he doesn't desire white women *per se*; his lust is for Munro's blood. In scene 31 underneath the waterfall, Hawkeye is similarly more concerned with Cora's safety than any outmoded notion of a "fate worse than death":

Hawkeye: "You stay alive. If they don't kill you they'll take you north up to Huron land. Submit, do you hear. Be strong. You survive. You stay alive no matter what occurs. I will find you. No matter how long it takes. No matter how far, I will find you."

This film's reflexive presumption that the racial "other" is a threatening "breed apart" who should be avoided whenever possible is an intractable kind of racism, near to all Americans in the 1990s. The point, therefore, is not so much to pass judgment on Michael Mann and his colleagues for their telling of this popular story merely reflects the same systems of thought and feeling that we all share. Instead, we can all take steps to think about and counter the hegemonic images of racism and despair that surround us all, committing ourselves to sorting out our collective multicultural heritage, past and present.

This 1992 Hawkeye is again tailored to white conceits: handsome with Rockstar hair, one-with-nature, sexually direct but sensitive. He also possesses the essential Old World qualities of honor and fair play, although he symbolically ends that tradition as well by shooting and killing Heyward in scene 36, ostensibly to put him out of his misery. Most importantly, though, the filmmakers decide to leave him on top of the mountain with Cora and Chingachgook in the film's final scene; the exact nature of Hawkeye and Cora's future together is thus sidestepped and left purposely unresolved. The latest filmed adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans*, therefore, remains another vivid reminder of how difficult it is for our culture to adequately imagine any credible solutions to the multiracial challenges that still confront us in the 1990s. More serious attempts, though, are bound to follow from Hollywood as well as elsewhere in contemporary society. Race in America is a subject that will not be denied.

#### NOTES

1. The American film industry has adapted *The Last of the Mohicans* at least eleven times: *Leather Stocking* (1909, Biograph); *In the Days of the Six Nations* (1911, Republic); *The Last of the Mohicans* (1911, Thanhouser); *Last of the Mohicans* (1911, Pat Powers); *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920, Associated Producers); *Last of the Mohicans* (1932, Mascot, serial); *Last of the Mohicans* (1936, United Artists); *Last of the Redmen* (1947, Columbia); *Along the Mohawk Trail* (1962, ITC/Incorporated Television, TV movie distributed theatrically overseas); *Last of the Mohicans* (1977, Schick Sunn); and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992, Fox). The B.B.C. also produced an eight-hour television mini-series based on Cooper's novel which was telecast in America on P.B.S. during 1972.

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# APPENDIX 1: PLOT SEGMENTATION AND SCENE FOCUS IN *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS* (1992)

## Sequences:

- A. Character Introduction Leading to First Ambush:
  1. deer hunt/*scene focus* determined by *camera point-of-view, time on-screen, image size and framing, amount of dialogue, and dramatic action*; Hawkeye, then Uncas & Ching
  2. Cameron homestead/Hawkeye, then Jack
  3. militia recruitment/Hawkeye, then Jack
  4. Heyward meets Webb/Heyward, then Webb
  5. Heyward sees Cora/Cora and Heyward
  6. first ambush/Hawkeye, then Magua, Heyward
- B. Escape to Fort William Henry
  7. river crossing by foot/Hawkeye, then Heyward
  8. ruins of the Cameron homestead/Hawkeye, then Cora
  9. conversation underneath the stars/Hawkeye and Cora
  10. arrival at fort/Hawkeye, then Cora
- C. Dramatic Struggles Within the Fort
  11. Col. Munro's office/Munro
  12. French camp/Magua, then Montcalm
  13. supply room/Hawkeye, then Cora
  14. messenger to Webb/Hawkeye
  15. colonial militia confronting Munro/Hawkeye, then Jack
  16. Cora rejects Heyward/Cora, then Heyward
  17. Hawkeye plotting with militia/Hawkeye and Jack
  18. Hawkeye and Cora come together/Hawkeye and Cora
- D. Surrender of the Fort and Second Ambush
  19. Hawkeye arrested/Hawkeye
  20. Cora confronting her father/Cora, then Munro, Heyward
  21. Cora visiting Hawkeye behind bars/Hawkeye, then Cora
  22. shelling of fort/no character focus
  23. Cora with Hawkeye in jail again/Hawkeye, then Cora
  24. surrender scene/Munro, then Montcalm
  25. Montcalm visits Magua/Magua, then Montcalm
  26. marching from fort/group focus
  27. second ambush/Hawkeye, then Magua
- E. River Chase and Capture
  28. escaping by canoe/Hawkeye
  29. retreat underneath waterfall/Hawkeye, then Cora
  30. Hurons searching with torches/Hawkeye
  31. Hawkeye, Chingachgook & Uncas escape/Hawkeye, then Cora
  32. Hurons capture Cora, Alice & Heyward/Hawkeye
- F. Pursuit and Huron Camp
  33. swimming to safety/group focus
  34. pursuit (cross-cutting) Hawkeye always leading

35. Huron camp/Magua and Hawkeye
36. transition: Magua leaves with Alice; Uncas pursues; Hawkeye leaves with Cora; Hawkeye shoots Heyward/Hawkeye
- G. Final Confrontation and Coda
37. Uncas fights Magua/Uncas and Magua
38. Alice throws herself off cliff/Magua, then Alice
39. Chingachgook kills Magua/Chingachgook, then Magua
40. final tableau/Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Cora

## APPENDIX 2: SHOT COMPOSITION OF SCENE 1 - DEER HUNT (Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas)

*Scene 1/Deer Hunt - a total of 34 shots lasting 2 minutes and 34 seconds:*

1. (3 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye running through the forest
2. (6 seconds) : Extreme long shot of Hawkeye running/forest
3. (4 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye running/forest
4. (2 seconds) : Medium shot of Hawkeye running/forest
5. (10 seconds) : Extreme long shot of Hawkeye running/forest
6. (3 seconds) : Medium shot of Uncas running/forest
7. (8 seconds) : Extreme long shot of Uncas running/forest
8. (7 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye jumping and running with Uncas/forest
9. (8 seconds) : Long shot of Chingachgook running/forest
10. (2 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/forest
11. (4 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/forest
12. (7 seconds) : Extreme long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/forest
13. (10 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running through a stream
14. (8 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/stream
15. (3 seconds) : Medium shot of Chingachgook running/forest
16. (6 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/forest
17. (3 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Uncas running/forest
18. (2 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye aiming rifle with Uncas in background
19. (2 seconds) : Long shot of stag running/forest
20. (3 seconds) : Medium shot of Hawkeye aiming rifle with Uncas in background
21. (2 seconds) : Medium shot of stag running/forest
22. (2 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye aiming
23. (1 second) : Close-up stag running/forest
24. (1 second) : Close-up of Hawkeye firing his rifle, "killdeer"

25. (1 second) : Long shot of stag falling
26. (1 second) : Long shot of stag falling
27. (4 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye staring into the camera
28. (9 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Chingachgook approaching the fallen stag
29. (8 seconds) : Medium shot of Hawkeye and Chingachgook approaching with focus clearly on Hawkeye
30. (4 seconds) : Medium shot of Chingachgook speaking in Munsee Delaware: "We're sorry to kill you, Brother."
31. (2 seconds) : Medium shot of Uncas reacting
32. (6 seconds) : Medium shot of Chingachgook finishing his words to the stag: "We do honor to your courage and speed, your strength."
33. (5 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas walking closer to the dead stag
34. (7 seconds) : Close-up of Uncas signing, "goodbye," with his hand to the stag

APPENDIX 3: SHOT COMPOSITION OF SCENE 40 -  
FINAL TABLEAU (Chingachgook, Hawkeye, and Cora  
standing on the mountaintop)

*Scene 40/Final Tableau - a total of 18 shots lasting 2 minutes and 42 seconds:*

1. (15 seconds) : Opening panorama from left to right in extreme long shot of the forest primeval ending in the final 2 seconds with a medium shot framing of Chingachgook and Hawkeye
2. (8 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye in foreground and Chingachgook in midground
3. (7 seconds) : Close-up of Cora reacting
4. (13 seconds) : Long shot of Chingachgook and Hawkeye together with Cora standing slightly apart and Chingachgook speaking in English: "Great Spirit and the maker of all life, a warrior goes to you swift and straight as an arrow shot into the sun."
5. (18 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye in foreground and Chingachgook in midground still speaking: "Welcome him and let him take his place at the council fire of my people. He is Uncas, my son, tell them to be patient and as death will speed..."
6. (13 seconds) : Medium shot of Chingachgook in foreground finishing his prayer with Hawkeye in midground: "...for they are all there but one, I Chingachgook, the last of the

- Mohicans."
7. (17 seconds) : Close-up of Chingachgook in midground, center-frame looking at Hawkeye who is in the foreground, frame-right with his back to the camera; Hawkeye places his hand on Chingachgook's shoulder and the background music begins quietly
  8. (8 seconds) : Close-up of Cora reacting
  9. (2 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye and Cora embracing as the background music increases in volume and intensity
  10. (5 seconds) : Close-up of Cora kissing Hawkeye
  11. (5 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye hugging Cora
  12. (9 seconds) : Close-up of Cora hugging Hawkeye
  13. (3 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye staring intensely at Cora
  14. (4 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye staring intensely at Cora
  15. (5 seconds) : Close-up of Cora staring intensely at Hawkeye
  16. (5 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye and Cora arm-in-arm with Chingachgook standing alone next to them
  17. (3 seconds) : Close-up of Hawkeye and Cora arm-in-arm with Chingachgook standing alone next to them
  18. (22 seconds) : Long shot of Hawkeye and Cora arm-in-arm with Chingachgook standing alone next to them as the background music reaches its crescendo and the shot dissolves into an extreme long shot framing of the forest primeval



Photo 1 : The 1920 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* contains the full gamut of pernicious features usually ascribed to the Hollywood Indian, including drunkenness (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art).



Photo 2 : In the 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, white actors were cast in all the key Native American roles, including Robert Barrat (left) as Chingachgook and Phillip Reed (right) as Uncas. Randolph Scott (center) starred as Hawkeye (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art).



Photo 3 : In the 1992 version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Daniel Day-Lewis as Hawkeye dominates the framing throughout. On the far left of this still is well-known Indian activist, Russell Means, who plays Chingachgook, and Native American actor, Eric Schweig, who plays Uncas ( Courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox).